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The Honourable Denis Paradis

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● (0845)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108, we are continuing our study of the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future.

I am very pleased to be with you here in Regina this morning.

I would ask committee members to introduce themselves briefly, starting with Jean Rioux.

Mr. Jean Rioux (Saint-Jean, Lib.): Good morning.

My name is Jean Rioux. I am the member for Saint-Jean, a riding south of Montreal that extends in part to the border.

My riding has witnessed a significant event for the francophonie: the return of French-language university training to the Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean. I think that's important for the French presence.

The Chair: René Arseneault has the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): My name is René Arseneault, and I am an Acadian from New Brunswick and the member for Madawaska–Restigouche. I am one of those people who have always resisted and still resist the invader. The invaders where I live don't fight battles or wars; they are the forces of assimilation. That's our daily struggle.

The Chair: I turn the floor over to Alupa Clarke.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Good morning, everyone, francophones from the west and from Saskatchewan.

I am a Alupa Clarke, a French Canadian from Quebec, from the old capital. I am the deputy critic for official languages of the Conservative Party of Canada, and I want you to know that this is very important for us and for our leader. I will be reporting to him on our trip.

We are getting ready to prepare a report on the modernization of the Official Languages Act starting this fall. Consequently, ladies and gentlemen, I'm eager to hear what you have to say.

The Chair: Thank you.

I now turn the floor over to Sylvie Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Good morning.

My name is Sylvie Boucher. I am the member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, where the magnificent G7 summit was held.

I was parliamentary secretary to the Minister of La Francophonie and Official Languages from 2006 to the end of 2007.

I have sat on the Standing Committee on Official Languages since I was re-elected in 2015. This is one of the only House of Commons committees where you see very little or no partisanship. We believe that language is very important, and we often fight together for the same vision: to keep the francophonie strong across the country.

The Chair: Thank you.

François Choquette has the floor.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Good morning, everyone.

My name is François Choquette, and I am the member for Drummond, a Quebec riding that is located between Montreal and Quebec City and includes the city of Drummondville.

I have been a member of Parliament since 2011 and mainly worked on the environment from 2011 to 2015. In 2015, I began to sit on the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I am one of the committee's vice-chairs.

I have had the good fortune to meet with many communities across Canada, but I have not yet met any communities from Saskatchewan, except when I had the honour to meet you in Manitoba last year.

I am also a French language teacher by profession and have taught many immigrants and newcomers. So I have some experience in the field.

● (0850)

The Chair: Thank you.

I am Denis Paradis, the member for Brome—Missisquoi, about an hour south of Montreal. My riding is located near the Vermont border in a region that features wineries.

I was Secretary of State for La Francophonie in a previous government.

Welcome, everyone.

This morning, we'll have the pleasure of hearing from Denis Simard and Ronald Labrecque from the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise, Carol-Guillaume Gagné and Mélissa Castonguay Cossette from the Association des parents fransaskois, Francis Kasongo from the Collège Mathieu, Kouame N'Goandi from the Conseil économique et coopératif de la Saskatchewan, Alpha Barry from the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises—Ms. Grimard is unable to be with us; and Anne Leis and Frédérique Baudemont from the Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan.

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen.

We are going to hear your presentations. As usual, we will give each organization about five minutes. Then we will go round the table, and committee members may ask questions or make comments.

Mr. Simard, we will begin with you.

Mr. Denis Simard (President, Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise): Excellent.

Good morning,Mr. Chair and committee members. My name is Dennis Simard, and I am president of the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise, the ACF.

I am here with our executive director, Ronald Labrecque.

I will have to leave around 9:45. I work for Habitat for Humanity, and today we are announcing that 10 new houses will be built next year and are introducing the 10 families who will live in them. I will have to leave, but Mr. Labrecque can answer all your questions in my absence.

I want to thank you for being here in Regina today as part of this study of the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future. Fransaskois community stakeholders are very grateful for this opportunity to appear before you and to tell you in person about their experiences and perceptions.

We are here on behalf of the ACF, the organization that represents the Fransaskois community. The ACF represents 5.,000 French-languge speakers who are residents of Saskatchewan. According to the 2016 census, 14,435 individuals have French as their first language.

We congratulated the government on this ambitious action plan the moment it was announced. However, we have a lot of catching up to do after 10 years without any increase in funding for our organizations. We haven't mentioned the impact of the increased cost of living or the lack of a new agreement between Canada and the Fransaskois community that would be consistent with our ambitions. The remedial 20% increase this year will not enable us to develop the plan for society that we must establish.

It is a constant challenge for the Fransaskois community to keep what we have. Whether it be the francophone media, government services, schools and school programs, health services or the sustainability of our institutions, we can take nothing for granted and must remain constantly vigilant. Services and programs may be questioned, decline or disappear from one moment to the next.

Here's a recent example to illustrate that. In the past 10 years, Saskatchewan has managed to double the number of students enrolled in the immersion program across the province. That's a great success. However, now we see that increasing numbers of school boards are dropping core French courses in the public schools. In fact, the number of students enrolled in core French courses in Saskatchewan is about half what it was 10 years ago.

Many Fransaskois schools are overcrowded as a result of increasing demand and an inability to adapt our infrastructure. You could say that some provincial and regional community organizations are in an acutely precarious position as a result of a lack of financial resources.

There is a consensus among education stakeholders on the idea of putting all educational phases on a minority French-language education continuum in Canada. It is important to support students early on in their learning and acquisition of the French language, as both a first language and a second language.

The report your committee published this past May, entitled "Growing Up in French in Western Canada: A Review of Federal Support for Early Childhood Education," is very clear on the importance of early childhood services for linguistic security and identity development. The path to francophone schools management in Saskatchewan has been a particularly hazardous one. Today, 25 years later, the challenges are still there: overcrowded schools, lack of infrastructure, need for re-francization programs, integrating newcomers, the gap between the supply of early childhood programs in francophone schools and the supply of those programs in majority schools. These points must be resolved.

French-language education still receives unequal treatment relative to English-language education in Saskatchewan. The successful transmission of French in a minority community is the result of close cooperation among the school, family and community spheres. French-language education must be supported from early childhood to the postsecondary level. A report on early childhood in minority communities published by the Commissioner of Official Languages in October 2016 clearly shows that this phase is "a critical period for language acquisition." Language experts agree. Consequently, it is vitally important for the communities that early childhood and preschool programs be included in the education continuum.

Our colleagues at the Conseil des écoles Fransaskoises have discussed this situation with you on several occasions, focusing more particularly on the challenges associated with financial cooperation by the province on junior kindergarten programs for children three and four years of age.

● (0855)

Funding for francophone postsecondary institutions faces equally troubling challenges. Funding for those institutions comes in large part from supplementary funding under bilateral education agreements. These funds are allocated near the end of the fiscal year, and the institutions do not know what amounts that will be allocated to them. It is virtually impossible for these institutions to function properly in the face of this uncertainty. This year, for example, a francophone nursing science program was added at the University of Regina. Despite that fact, the operating funding normally allocated to the Cité universitaire francophone was cut so deeply that it destabilized many services that had been provided for decades.

You must keep in mind the role and importance of infrastructure in Saskatchewan's official language minority community. Many school and community centres have been built in the past 40 years. Those institutions have spaces where French language and culture can spread. These are places for gathering and exchange where the cultural experience enables communities to excel, create and define themselves. Resources available to date prevent us from doing more than the bare minimum to maintain those centres. The action plan provides for investment in community infrastructure, and that has been very well received by our community.

School facilities in the education sector are obsolete in many cases. Infrastructure at many schools can no longer perform its original function, and there is a critical need for renovation and construction. There is also a chronic shortage of primary schools for francophones in Saskatchewan's largest cities as existing buildings cannot meet the demand. This gives cause for concern, and the community has come together to demand an adequate solution.

Infrastructure in the health sector would help support French-language health services. This sector is a troubling and major issue for an active and healthy community. Clinics would help bring together health professionals to provide services in Canada's two official languages, thus serving the francophone community, which is very often forgotten in this sector.

Two court cases, *R. v. Mercure* and *R. v. Alberta*, attest to the efforts the Fransaskois community has made to obtain official linguistic recognition by the government of Saskatchewan. In these two cases, the evidence adduced of the constitutional nature of language rights failed to convince six of the nine judges of the Supreme Court of Canada. The logic behind these proceedings for francophones is to restore the legitimate and historical status of the French language in the minds of the majority and provincial authorities, while recalling the measures put in place to protect it.

In the circumstances, and after a half-century of official bilingualism in Canada, provincial services should be active champions of linguistic duality. However, they are not and are still far from being so.

The Francophone Affairs Branch plays an important role in our relations with the various provincial departments and services. Substantial resources would help them achieve that goal in order to build an inclusive and comprehensive Saskatchewan community enhanced by its linguistic strength.

● (0900)

The Chair: Mr. Simard, I would ask you to conclude your presentation because there are many more witnesses to be heard.

Mr. Denis Simard: That's fine. I'll have to skip a page or two.

The Chair: You may also respond to questions and comments shortly.

Mr. Denis Simard: The first francophones in the west were Métis. The ACF acknowledges that permanent dialogue must be maintained with indigenous people and Métis across the Canadian francophonie. The ACF signed a pact of solidarity with the Métis nation of Saskatchewan in 2012. It also recognizes the importance of developing projects that reflect indigenous people and cultural pluralism in Saskatchewan. In this reconciliation context, we ask the federal government to support this effort to dialogue with indigenous people and Métis.

In conclusion, Canada is a country that appeals to millions of people from around the world who have chosen to settle and live their lives here. For those who have grown up with the Official Languages Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, respect for differences and minorities, as well as tolerance and openness toward others, form the basis of our society.

The Canadian government's action plan for official languages must be bold and courageous and an authentic reflection of Canadian values, while respecting the country's territorial, bilingual and multicultural reality.

On behalf of the Fransaskois community, thank you for listening.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Simard.

Mr. Gagné, we are listening.

Mr. Carol-Guillaume Gagné (Chief Executive Officer, Association des parents fransaskois): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank you, at the outset, for listening to us. We officially invited you in April, when I was with Mr. Barry and another colleague from the board. Thank you for accepting our invitation. It feels good to know that our elected representatives sometimes listen to us. It's reassuring. Thank you very much.

First, let's look at the action plan and the funding you have begun to allocate.

As you can see, an initial amount is allocated to Canadian Heritage, which is quite promising for our community. I'm talking here about a 20% funding increase. That has already helped to improve all our programming. It's a good start. As my colleague Mr. Simard said earlier, it's a start, because I have to say we have a lot of catching up to do.

Given the situation and the IBC, we still have a long way to go even with that 20% increase. We are still underfunded. I can see it in my organization. We still provide services that are not adequately funded. Sometimes we provide services that are not of the desired quality. We are unable to provide services of quality equal to that of the services provided by the majority. We still offer lower-quality services to the minority. How can we continue to attract our families and clients in these circumstances? We aren't playing by the same rules. We can't operate this way.

If the government doesn't continue increasing funding for our services, we'll still be here talking about it in 10 years. We'll still be in the same situation, by which I mean that parents will assisting the community's efforts because they believe in the cause, not because we are providing something of quality. It would be unfortunate for matters to come to that.

At least I can congratulate the Department of Canadian Heritage for its receptive attitude toward the idea of services provided by and for the main persons concerned. That is a sign of respect for our community. We've been having regular discussions with the department's representatives for two weeks now and have witnessed this openness and respect. They want to try to understand how they can grant funding based on our situation on the ground. I tip my hat to the Department of Canadian Heritage for that. It's showing real openness.

However, we can also see that perhaps it should stop scattering money left and right to please everyone. One day or another, it will have to determine the lower threshold at which organizations should be funded.

Let's look at the numbers. An organization must have management. In many cases, it hires an assistant. There are normal operating costs. You may calculate minimum funding of $60,000 or $70,000, whereas the government instead provides $20,000 or $30,000 in funding to organizations, hoping they can prepare high-quality programming. That's not logical. Perhaps it should establish a lower threshold that organizations are guaranteed so they can offer something of quality.

That's a finding that all managements have made, and we'll have to take a look at it. This is directed at the Department of Canadian Heritage, but all other organizations as well.

We were with IRCC once again this week. The situation was the same. We aren't underemployed. We also have to have decent salaries. If our organizations want to retain labour, they must offer high-quality services and good salaries. Our organizations have very high turnover rates as a result of their underfunding. We can't go on this way.

In addition, the action plan allocates $20 million to support childcare services. That's another very promising amount. The federal government has allocated a new amount so we can open new childcare spaces quickly, together with the provincial government. This is a tripartite effort that we're making with RDÉE Canada, the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne and the CNPF.

Now I'll ask our association's administrator to say more about that.

● (0905)

Ms. Mélissa Castonguay Cossette (Administrator, Association des parents fransaskois): My name is Mélissa Castonguay Cossette, and I am here as the APF's administrator, but I am also the director of a francophone educational centre in Gravelbourg. I also sit on the parents committee of the École Beau Soleil, which is part of the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises, and on the committee of Gravelbourg's Association communautaire fransaskoise. So I sort of spread myself around. I am directly concerned by early childhood. My children attend the centre where I work. They are at the school, and we participate in the APF's activities as often as possible.

We at the APF are very pleased to see that $20 million will be invested in early childhood to support the training and professional development of educators and to help open more francophone educational centres in Saskatchewan. There is a glaring shortage of spaces in the educational centres, and waiting lists are very long. Parents put their names on a list as soon as they know they are expecting a child to ensure they have a space for the child at a francophone educational centre. Despite that fact, they do not always manage to get their children into a centre because the sector doesn't have enough spaces for babies, mainly, and toddlers.

This $20 million investment will really help to create new centres and provide more early childhood services, which will promote greater retention. There is a risk that children who do not attend a francophone educational centre may enrol in majority institutions, not continue their studies at a CEF school or follow the francophone community in general.

The APF always works with its partners, the Collège Mathieu and the Conseil économique et coopératif de la Saskatchewan. This is a major partnership effort. We are very pleased to be able to continue working as partners to find strategies for establishing better childcare services and better services for our educators. It is very hard to retain educators in the francophone early childhood sector in Saskatchewan. We have very good educators who take courses given by the Collège Mathieu. Those courses are subsidized by Saskatchewan's Ministry of Education, which is excellent. The girls come and work at an educational centre once they've completed their training. Once they've earned a level 3 and a diploma, they can easily find work elsewhere and earn better salaries. Salaries at Saskatchewan educational centres are not very high relative to those at other institutions. We often lose our educators. We train them, and we are pleased, and then they go away. The process then has to start over with new educators. Changing educators is not always ideal for the children, or for the centre.

If you want development by and for the communities, why not let our community choose the strategies it wants to put in place instead of setting funding limits and percentages? We were told that 33% of funding had to go to entrepreneurship and 66% to training. We would've liked to have a little more decision-making power because we're the ones who are on the ground and who know our community's early childhood needs. It's essential that the criteria and solutions proposed under the new early childhood funding framework be flexible and adapted to the needs of our communities.

In Saskatchewan, we really need to work on recruitment and labour retention and to create new educational centres in the communities that want them. Some Fransaskois communities have been waiting a long time for an educational centre. The $20 million will definitely help us help them.

We are counting on you to continue supporting the communities and the Association des parents fransaskois.

Thank you.

● (0910)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Castonguay Cossette.

Now we will hear from Mr Kasongo..

Mr. Carol-Guillaume Gagné: Have we already used up the five minutes allotted to us?

The Chair: You ran to more than eight minutes. I exercised a little patience.

Mr. Carol-Guillaume Gagné: All right; that's fine.

The Chair: Mr. Kasongo, we are listening.

Mr. Francis Kasongo (Executive Director, Collège Mathieu): Good morning, Mr. Chair and honourable members.

My name is Francis Kasongo, and I am executive director of the Collège Mathieu, which will celebrate its 100th anniversary next week, on October 6 and 7. You will be welcome to attend the event if you delay your departure.

First and foremost, I wish you the warmest of welcomes, particularly here in Regina.

In view of the time allotted to me, I will stick to the essential points of my presentation.

During the 2016 cross-Canada consultations on official languages, postsecondary educational institutions, particularly francophone institutions, asked the federal government to consider the contribution that colleges and institutes make to the vitality of the francophone minority communities and anglophone communities in Quebec, to learning, to the promotion of second languages and to the integration of immigrants in a context of diversity and multiculturalism.

After those consultations, in which I took part, the following recommendations were made.

First, as many francophone postsecondary institutions serve a dispersed rural population, it is essential that we develop a training delivery mechanism. This must include the development of rural campuses and the creation of digital tools that can be used to expand the offer of French-language programs across Canada and to reach a public dispersed over large area.

Second, the government should support partnerships between postsecondary institutions to offer greater diversity of programs to francophone minority communities.

Third, funding should be reserved for French-language training for professionals in sectors essential to the vitality of the minority communities, in particular, health, education, early childhood and justice.

Fourth, a budget envelope should be set aside to enable minority institutions to bear the additional expenses associated with the provision of minority-language training.

Fifth, language management efforts made in the postsecondary sector should be expanded to provide postsecondary institutions with the means to continue the work begun by the school boards and to train graduates who will be called upon to work in the minority sector and to meet the challenges associated with transmission of the French language.

Bilingualism is a central feature of the Canadian identity and an enormous asset for Canadians as a whole. However, it requires special care that relies above all on education, which is essential to the transmission and promotion of our two official languages and to the vitality of our community, the Fransaskois community.

Collège Mathieu, like other postsecondary educational institutions, such as the University of Regina's Cité universitaire francophone, offers training programs and services every year to Saskatchewan francophones and francophiles. Collège Mathieu offers credit programs, language training and customized courses to 700 students from all francophone communities. The college, of course, is well aware of its responsibility within the Fransaskois community since it contributes to a strengthening of that community's vitality, to greater access to French-language services and, lastly, to the promotion of a bilingual Canada by helping students gain access to postsecondary studies in their mother tongue, assisting newcomers in learning one of our official languages and encouraging the learning of a second language.

It is useful to note that the role our institution plays very often goes beyond education. Our institution is becoming a veritable crossroads for francophones and francophiles where the minority language can both be transmitted and flourish.

The main question is this: does the action plan reflect the cross-Canada consultations on official languages that Canadian Heritage conducted in 2016.

Generally speaking, the action plan does reflect the cross-Canada consultations that Canadian Heritage conducted in 2016 because it addresses most of the recommendations respecting postsecondary institutions by providing for funding to develop new study programs and to increase the enrolment capacity of existing programs for language training, francophone immigration and bilingualism promotion. These are only some of the recommendations to which the current action plan responds.

● (0915)

In conclusion, Collège Mathieu is a major, even essential, player in French-language postsecondary education in Saskatchewan. Thanks to the financial support provided under the action plan and as a result of the federal-provincial agreement on education, it makes a significant contribution to the development and vitality of the Fransaskois community by offering, as it has done for the past 100 years, study programs and services across all of Saskatchewan and even outside the province.

The federal government's recent unveiling of the new Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future clearly affords postsecondary educational institutions such as Collège Mathieu many opportunities to expand their selection of study programs, particularly in the health field, and to refresh their infrastructure, even though that is not expressly stated in the action plan. It is useful to note, however, that delays in allocating and transferring grants and contributions are clearly too long and jeopardize the activities of institutions such as the Collège Mathieu.

The literacy component intended for francophone minority adults does not appear to be funded under the present action plan. However, improved adult literacy could very well address the need for labour in the job market and promote citizen engagement in the community.

The lack of accountability mechanisms in federal-provincial agreements is another aspect that concerns us. To some extent, it does not help a postsecondary institution such as ours benefit from certain programs developed in accordance with provincial criteria.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Kasongo.

Mr. N'Goandi, you have the floor.

Mr. Kouame N'Goandi (Manager, Accountability, Conseil économique et coopératif de la Saskatchewan): Good morning.

Today, I represent the Conseil économique et coopératif de la Saskatchewan. Our organization has been in existence for 71 years and is committed to economic development for Saskatchewan francophones.

People often ask us how we can engage in economic development in French in Saskatchewan. It's being done thanks to the men, women, entrepreneurs and organizations that want to be served in French and to many partnerships that we have established with the federal government. We nevertheless manage to provide services within our means.

For example, in western Canada, we have a partnership with Western Economic Diversification Canada, or WD. The four western provinces also have francophone economic organizations that help those provinces work together to provide services to francophones in the region.

The challenges we face in this project are still enormous. How can we provide services to Fransaskois residents without really being able to do it in a very professional way? I don't want to repeat what the others have said, but the resources available to address the expectations we have are always very limited.

In addition, some agreements, such as those we have with Canada Economic Development, or CED, which covers all the provinces and territories except Quebec, really give us a chance to put in place the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité du Canada, or RDÉE Canada. We always try as far as possible to provide services in the areas of community economic development, business development and employability.

Similarly, challenges differ from province to province. Consider the case of Saskatchewan. Since you won't be here for long, you won't have occasion to visit all our francophone communities. Since they are somewhat dispersed, no matter the organization at the table, it always costs more to provide services to francophones than to other organizations. Consider the example of an organization based in Winnipeg. In Manitoba, 80% of the francophone community lives in Winnipeg. Here in Saskatchewan, we have francophones in Regina, Bellegarde, Zenon Park and Debden, and I'll stop there. We face enormous challenges.

We nevertheless want to thank the government for the roadmap that is still in force this year. We made some proposals. I think some of them were considered and others even implemented.

My colleague from the Association des parents fransaskois raised a very important point: we have to see how the organizations in our communities can work together to determine challenges and solve problems. For that purpose, the government allocated funding to enable economic organizations such as ours, the Association des parents francophones and the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne to work together and to find solutions to our communities' problems. This is a very interesting point, but we still have to work on the mechanics. I think we have to move in that direction and keep an open mind. We can still enter into these kinds of agreements. I would like the next roadmap to include a partnership with Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan. I think there are some challenges facing the community that we can work on.

● (0920)

I believe some steps have been taken. However, given what we see on the ground and the projects we see that majority organizations are able to carry out, we still have some challenges to overcome. They must be taken into consideration in certain programs and agreements.

In closing, I would add that the agreements reached between the federal government and the provinces should be more clearly defined in some respects. The francophone file is not solely the federal government's responsibility. The provinces also have some responsibilities. The representative associations should probably notify the organizations affected by these programs and agreements so they can see to what extent services will be offered to francophones.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. N'Goandi.

Now we will hear from Mr. Barry

Mr. Alpha Barry (Chair, Conseil des écoles fransaskoises): Thank you, Mr. Chair

Good morning, members, ladies and gentlemen. My sincere thanks for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises, the CEF.

The CEF has carefully analyzed the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future.

First, we are grateful that significant investments have been announced in minority language education and early childhood services. The CEF thanks the federal government for listening to and acknowledging its concerns about the need to invest in the early childhood sector.

Unfortunately, the CEF has observed that one of its priorities is simply absent from the action plan, which includes no announcement on structural solutions necessary to address the defects of the current framework for managing federal financial support for minority language education.

Instead, the action plan advocates the use of the usual financial support instruments, which are clearly defective, that is to say, the Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction and its bilateral agreements. In short, the action plan confirms the status quo on this issue. However, your committee and the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages had acknowledged the various problems associated with these instruments and had made recommendations to address the problems of transparency, consultation and accountability.

The CEF wishes to take advantage of this study to present its observations and proposals for the permanent structural changes necessary to ensure the success of the framework for managing the federal government's financial support for French-language education. These changes call for the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

Here, then, briefly, are the four main failings of that management framework as well as proposals for amending the act that we respectfully submit to you. However, we invite you to consult paragraphs 14 to 23 of the brief we have submitted for our general explanation of how this framework operates.

First, the protocol is defective since it allows the needs of the francophone and Acadian minority communities to be determined unilaterally by the provinces and territories, which is contrary to the school boards' exclusive power of management and control.

Second, the protocol does not require the government to consult the French-language minority school boards.

Third, the protocol provides for no effective accountability mechanism worthy of that name.

Fourth, the protocol permits the funding allocated to elementary and secondary minority education to be used to fund the essential costs of that education, but not the truly additional costs. Our brief provides several examples demonstrating these failings and the harmful effects they have on French-language education in Saskatchewan.

Furthermore, with respect to early childhood, the CEF fears that the recent Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework reproduces the accountability, transparency and consultation problems noted in connection with the framework for the management of federal financial support for minority-language education. In its May 2018 report on early childhood, your committee recommended that the government amend the Official Languages Act to establish and specify an increased role for the federal government in the area of minority language education, including early childhood education.

In view of the status quo under the action plan, the CEF respectfully requests that you support its proposed statutory amendment, which fully acknowledges the constitutional management powers assigned to the school boards. Thus, the purpose of our legislative proposals is to establish an express obligation to consult the French-language school boards on the development and negotiation of the protocol. You will find the full text of the clauses we propose in paragraph 59 of our brief.

To sum up, the CEF is grateful for investments that have been announced. However, we are convinced that it is high time to reform the framework for managing financial support in the education and early childhood sector.

● (0925)

We thank you for listening and are prepared to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Barry.

Now we will hear from Ms. Anne Leis.

Mrs. Anne Leis (President, Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan): Good morning. My name is Anne Leis. I am a professor in the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology at the University of Saskatchewan and president of the Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan.

When I feel sick or vulnerable, I am sick in my language: French. Receiving health services and care in French is a matter of safety and quality. "Patients who experience a state of chronic or episodic vulnerability are at greater risk of suffering very serious negative impact on their health directly related to their inability to communicate their needs in a second language." That is what Danielle de Moissac states in a research report published in 2016. I know I'm telling you nothing new; you are aware of this. I am nevertheless trying to provide you with a bit of context.

The research has also conclusively and systematically established the negative impacts of linguistic barriers. I know you are absolutely aware of all this. Consider the following examples: "low participation in health promotion and prevention activities; delayed presentation for care; barriers to initial access for most health services; increased risks of misdiagnosis; poorer patient understanding of and adherence to prescribed treatment; lower patient satisfaction; increased risk of experiencing adverse events; poorer management of chronic disease; and less effective pain management." These are the impacts cited by Sarah Bowen in a 2015 report entitled "Impact of Language Barriers on Patient Safety and Quality of Care," a compilation of research conducted in recent years.

Allow me to introduce the Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan.

We established our network in 2006 and are one of 16 provincial and territorial member networks of the Société santé en français. We receive funding from Health Canada through the Société santé en français under the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future. That funding is intended for our network activities with our five partner health groups: health services managers, health professionals, training institutions, political decision-makers and the community. We are formed in accordance with the five partners determined by the World Health Organization.

The Réseau's mission is to ensure better access to health and social services and programs in French in Saskatchewan. It's quite a challenge.

In Saskatchewan, the Réseau strives to improve access to French language health services, in particular for families and their children, newcomers and seniors, this last group representing approximately 55% of Saskatchewan's francophone population.

In the next few years, our main objective will be to work with our partners to implement and more effectively structure French-language health services in a completely anglophone community. We especially strive to work in the cities of Saskatoon and Regina, but also to improve access to health services in rural areas and to provide resources to students and health professionals so they are better equipped to serve francophone patients. Believe me, there are francophones out there, but you have to go looking for them.

Now I will talk about the health reform in Saskatchewan.

As you are no doubt aware, a major health reform is under way in Saskatchewan, and it is establishing new possibilities and better positioning the Réseau as a preferred health partner for Saskatchewan's francophone population.

A thorough reform was conducted in December 2017, and a single provincial health authority was created, replacing the 12 existing regional boards. This new health authority is engaged in a major process to transform the system. Allow me to cite a passage in English:

● (0930)

[*English*]

> We are driven by the commitment to improve frontline patient care for Saskatchewan people [and I'll add that Saskatchewan people include francophones], and we are working together to better coordinate health services across the province to ensure patients receive high quality, timely health care, wherever they live in Saskatchewan.

This was a direct quote.

[*Translation*]

The Réseau has met on two occasions with senior officials of the health authority, who have expressed interest in cooperating. We want to formalize this cooperation by officially becoming a French-language health care advisory committee, as already exists in Manitoba, Nova Scotia and other provinces.

The Ministry of Health has expressed growing interest in working with the Réseau by adapting resources to support students and professionals. You may be familiar with some services such as Tel-Aide Outaouais. We are trying to determine whether we can have access to it here in Saskatchewan because it is a French-language helpline that could reach all francophones across the province, including seniors who live in isolated situations. The problem is that a little money and leverage are required to obtain those services. There is some receptiveness on this point, but the provincial government needs to be prodded or assisted.

That brings me to my last part, which is how you can help us. I see three possible sectors where you could support us.

First, there is the matter of bilingual human resources. It is impossible to obtain French-language health services without health professionals who speak French. These are essential to ensuring the effective delivery of high-quality and safe health services to the official language communities. We must establish a systematic registry of bilingual health professionals, a system that is more than word of mouth. It is not enough for someone to tell us there is a francophone physician in a particular place or a nurse who speaks French at some other place because we are never sure we can come across these health professionals who speak French. That's why it's important to keep a systematic registry of health professionals who speak French.

What can the federal government do in this regard?

We know that the professional associations gather or try to gather information on the languages spoken by their members, but that's done on a voluntary basis. Members may choose to indicate on their association registration forms whether they speak English, French, Arabic or other languages, but they are not required to do so.

There are also national surveys, and that's what interests me. The federal government conducts major surveys of health professionals, and they should ensure that they systematically record the language or languages spoken by those professionals. The surveys should also determine their training needs. Some surveys already do that, but not all. We aren't very familiar with their needs across the country. It might be useful to ask questions about that.

I would like to raise another point. By making targeted health investments, the federal government could also encourage the systematic recording of patients' language preferences on their health cards. This is already the case in Prince Edward Island. What incentives could the federal government put in place, in federal-provincial agreements or in another way, for that to become the universal standard and for patients' language preferences to be stated on their health cards? I put that question to you.

● (0935)

The Chair: Would you please wrap up your remarks, madame?

Mrs. Anne Leis: I'm almost finished. I have one example left, and that is federal-provincial agreements on mental health and home care. Is there any way to require governments to take official language minorities into consideration in those agreements? This is very useful in the early childhood field, and it should appear in all agreements. Otherwise we will always fall through the cracks.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thanks to all all of you for your superb presentations.

We will immediately go round the table so my colleagues can ask their questions and make their comments.

I will begin with Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning to all of you, ladies and gentlemen. I am very pleased to be with you in Saskatchewan today.

This is the third place we have visited in three days. We've met with nearly all francophone groups from all provinces in the past year and a half.

Listening to you this morning, I sensed bitterness and considerable frustration. I sense it's not easy for you in Saskatchewan, but please know that we hear you and sympathize with you. We know your situation is not an easy one.

I will begin by telling you that French is an everyday struggle in Canada. Some people, like you, are in the trenches every day of their lives. I want to thank you, and I know this isn't easy. As a Conservative from Old Quebec, I'm in a political trench, but you are in a linguistic trench.

Getting back to serious matters, although I understand your frustration and bitterness over your respective files, such as health, school boards, economic development, parents and the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise, I would like to hear what you have to say about topics other than your respective grievances. Our main task from now until the next election—at least it's my objective—is to lay the foundation for a revision of the Official Languages Act.

Mr. Barry, I believe you touched on that subject a little earlier when I went out for coffee. I heard you talk about modernizing the act. I was just leaving, and I felt I had to come back as soon as possible. However, I believe the concern you addressed was just about the school boards.

I would like each of you to give me one or two general priorities that you would like to see addressed in the Official Languages Act, such as enforcement powers for the Commissioner. That's a priority; it's a general one, and it's mine.

Let's start with you, Mr. Simard. What are your priorities for the revision of the act?

● (0940)

Mr. Denis Simard: I have three.

First, I agree that the act needs to have teeth. It needs something that will ensure it can be defended at all levels of government.

Second, every province and territory should have an ombudsman or commissioner of official languages who is responsible for ensuring that the official language minority communities are protected.

Third, we must ensure that the Official Languages Act affords protection for the education sector and confers the power necessary to ensure that the education sector can take major steps forward.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Labrecque, you have the floor.

Mr. Ronald Labrecque (Executive Director, Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise): I can add that the provinces should be urged or required to promote the vitality and maintenance of the francophonie in agreements between Canada and the provinces, including Saskatchewan.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Do you mean language clauses?

Mr. Ronald Labrecque: Yes.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: That's what we've heard everywhere in the past four days.

Thank you.

Mr. Gagné, would you like to add a comment?

Mr. Carol-Guillaume Gagné: Yes, I'm going to take advantage of your question to tell you about one of my dreams.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: That's great.

Mr. Carol-Guillaume Gagné: It's nice to have dreams, isn't it?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Yes. I have a lot of them.

Mr. Carol-Guillaume Gagné: Sometimes we have a few too many.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: That's one of my problems too.

Mr. Carol-Guillaume Gagné: If we want our young people to remain francophone, we have to provide them with jobs, but we also have to make them love the culture. How can they be proud of that culture when they listen to radio and watch television that has no francophone content? They have to find the francophonie interesting.

The CRTC requires a minimum amount of francophone content in certain provinces. Here, on the other hand, there is no such requirement, and if we want to have francophone content, we have to tune in to Radio-Canada or browse the Internet. Our young people, our francophone majority, don't consume francophone content and therefore cannot share pride in their culture with their friends. Perhaps one day organizations like the CRTC may at least impose a minimum amount of francophone content on our majority.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: That would be revolutionary in western Canada.

Mr. Carol-Guillaume Gagné: It would be nice. That's my dream.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: That would be great.

Do you have a comment, Ms. Castonguay Cossette?

Ms. Mélissa Castonguay Cossette: I had the same dream in mind. Francophone culture and pride don't depend solely on the use of French at school; they also have to be experienced outside school. I would really appreciate your assistance on this file for the benefit of our Fransaskois families.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: All right.

Mr. Kasongo, what would your general priority be?

Mr. Francis Kasongo: My general priority would be that language clauses be included in federal-provincial agreements. As for accountability, the language clauses must have more teeth.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I see.

Mr. N'Goandi, what would your priority be?

Mr. Kouame N'Goandi: I won't repeat what has already been said. I think I mentioned at the start of my remarks that language clauses were very important. They address situations that often cause frustration in our communities. I also agree that the act should be modernized, but it should be made more fluid?

● (0945)

Mr. Alupa Clarke: What do you mean by "fluid"?

Mr. Kouame N'Goandi: I would like us to be able to understand what the act says. It shouldn't be drafted in legal jargon that requires us to consult a lawyer so we can understand what it says.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Barry, what would your overall priority be?

Mr. Alpha Barry: I was looking at Mr. Arseneault when Mr. N'Goandi mentioned lawyers.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: He's a lawyer, and this is complicated even for him.

Mr. Alpha Barry: On top of everything else.

As you said, we at the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises want to address the legislative problem from a structural standpoint.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: What do you mean?

Mr. Alpha Barry: It's simple. On the one hand, we have a constitution that provides that school boards and communities must manage their own linguistic and cultural issues. On the other hand, we have bilateral and other agreements whose implementation clearly violates the object of section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I see.

Mr. Alpha Barry: To my mind, the fact that two government authorities negotiate and decide in our stead, without consulting us, is a problem. Once that situation is resolved, we can sit around the table and solve the problem of allocating funding. However, we can't discuss reopening the constitution today.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I'd like to, but that really is impossible.

Pardon me for interrupting, but I absolutely want to hear from the last few witnesses. We were talking about mandatory consultations.

Mr. Alpha Barry: I agree that modernizing the act must include recognition of our full management right. The rest will be resolved once that's in place.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I see.

Ms. Leis and Ms. Baudemont, do you have any comments?

Mrs. Anne Leis: I agree with everything you've said.

The Chair: Pardon me for interrupting, madame.

I simply want to clarify a point. Every speaker has approximately six minutes to make personal remarks, ask questions and give answers. If everyone is to be able to speak, I would ask you all to shorten your remarks.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Chair, I understand that, but please allow me to repeat my questions to the witnesses.

I'm asking our witnesses to state their general priorities. I understand all their grievances, their sadness and their frustration. We can't require the provincial government to do anything. However, I want to hear what they expect from the federal government, what general priority they would like to see included in the act.

Mrs. Frédérique Baudemont (Executive Director, Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan): Our fundamental priority is that the act become prescriptive and not remain merely an encouraging pat on the back. I'm thinking in particular of Canadian Heritage's role, which is currently limited to creating awareness, to prodding ministers who are making little effort.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: That's not much.

Mrs. Frédérique Baudemont: Apart from federal-provincial agreements, I also want to talk about the whole interdepartmental component and Canadian Heritage's role in that regard. The other departments must understand their responsibilities, and I'm talking here about all departments, not just a few.

The Chair: Thank you very much, madame.

Now we'll turn the floor over to Mr. René Arseneault from New Brunswick.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for their excellent testimony. I'm tempted to call them "the resisters". I obviously appreciated the answers given to Mr. Clarke, which are very useful in a general way. However, I won't take the same tack as my colleague since we have to gather the most diverse range of arguments and testimony possible in order to draft our recommendations and report.

Bilateral federal-provincial agreements should definitely include linguistic obligations. I'm asking the witnesses to make suggestions in turn in a concise manner. We have our own ideas, of course, but our report and recommendations must reflect what the witnesses have told us or recommended.

An hon. member: That's because you're a lawyer.

● (0950)

Mr. René Arseneault: I'm a troubadour first and a lawyer second, but it's true that our role is to report what the witnesses tell us and the solutions they suggest to us.

I'm going to address the representatives of the health field first. What criteria or obligations do you think we should consider in federal-provincial agreements?

Mrs. Frédérique Baudemont: On health, I think I would go back to what Ms. Leis previously said.

Where federal funding is allocated to mental health or home care, for example, the act should require that provisions be included in those agreements compelling the provinces and territories to consult francophones and provide them with services in French.

Mr. René Arseneault: We already conduct too many consultations.

Mrs. Frédérique Baudemont: That's true, but I assure you the provinces don't do it that much. The idea is to provide services to francophones and to take the minority into account.

Mrs. Anne Leis: I think they should make decisions together. That goes beyond consultation. They should work together. As they say in English: *Nothing about me without me*.

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Barry, do you have anything to add?

Mr. Alpha Barry: We don't want these clauses to be mere scarecrows: they must have teeth. In modernizing the act, we could solve the structural problem by including binding provisions that enhance the Commissioner's powers. The idea is to guarantee compliance with the linguistic clauses in bilateral agreements. I won't repeat the fine phrase I just heard, but that's the philosophy we want to have.

Mr. René Arseneault: All right.

Mr. N'Goandi, I'm listening.

Mr. Kouame N'Goandi: I think this point has already been raised. It's quite clear that, in the case of an agreement between the federal and provincial governments, local organizations must be engaged at some point, through either a representative organization or the relevant organization. It's important to bear in mind that we in the francophonie are well organized: regardless of the program or service, there is an organization specializing in that program or service. The question then is how those organizations can be mobilized. That's my viewpoint.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. N'Goandi.

Mr. Kasongo, do you wish to add anything?

Mr. Francis Kasongo: I think my colleagues have mentioned this. Provisions should be included that compel the provinces to deal with the francophone community.

Consider the labour market agreement, for example. Institutions such as the Collège Mathieu were unaware that we could provide our communities with basic essential skills training. It's that kind of detail that's important. If the agreement has that binding character that requires the province to deal with its francophone community, we will be able to participate in the program and provide the service to the community.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you.

Mr. Carol-Guillaume Gagné: If there is one thing that bothers me about this entire funding issue, it's the fact that there's no continuity. We're required to submit every project again, changing only one or two sentences in the description from one year to the next, to obtain funding, even if the project is already working well. Could we put a stop to this cycle and guarantee that funding and projects will continue?

Mr. René Arseneault: That is a good point.

Mr. Labrecque, do you have anything to add?

Mr. Ronald Labrecque: Regarding the agreements, there are some very good examples of changes made to language clauses in Ontario and New Brunswick. I think we can look to what has already been done in those provinces and other good potential solutions that are out there.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you.

Any other comments, Mr. Simard?

Mr. Denis Simard: I will add a couple of things.

First, I think we need to find a way to make it mandatory for governments to work with the Franco-Saskatchewanian community, the Acadian community and other francophone communities.

Second, it is extremely important to note that in almost every agreement, the province has to match the amount of investment.

Mr. René Arseneault: Excuse me, Mr. Simard. When you talk about "governments", do you mean provincial governments?

Mr. Denis Simard: Yes, absolutely.

These agreements raise the issue of matching funds. Provinces have to match the investment made by the federal government.

What I would like to see is for all provincial organizations or departments to match the federal investment with an infrastructure equivalent. Take the Cité universitaire francophone in Regina, for example. The government could say, "Here, we are not giving you any money, but the building you are currently using is now yours." The Franco-Saskatchewanian community could then add value to the infrastructure it is using.

I am essentially suggesting that the matching investment be made with infrastructure first, and then with funding. The Franco-Saskatchewanian community could attest that it owns and benefits from dozens of millions of dollars—I am making up a number—worth of infrastructure. We could provide equivalent amounts to what the province would invest as infrastructure. Why not give us an amount equivalent to our share?

● (0955)

The Chair: Thank you all for your answers, and thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

We will now turn to Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank all witnesses for their great presentations and very useful answers.

It is true that the action plan raises a lot of questions and passionate feelings about a possible update to the Official Languages Act.

When we travelled to Yukon, we received two or three major proposals about modernizing the Official Languages Act. You mentioned a few, including the language clauses and the need to apply them to every sector. We have to make sure that the money transferred is also invested in health and education services in French, and so on.

There is one thing, however, that has not been mentioned a lot, and that is sustainability. What was suggested about that in Yukon is that the obligation to present a five-year plan every five years should be enshrined in the Official Languages Act. That would ensure that there is no vacuum when a plan comes to an end.

A recent article by #ONfr revealed that francophone organizations are still waiting for the funding they were promised. I wondered about the 20% increase that was promised in May to most of the organizations. We were told that some organizations received the funding, but not others.

I know that you probably received a letter telling you that you would get that money soon. However, in the meantime, you are still waiting.

What is your situation? What are the consequences? Does it prevent you from launching initiatives or from hiring and retaining employees?

I would like to hear your thoughts on that, briefly. Time is short, unfortunately.

Please, go ahead.

Mrs. Frédérique Baudemont: We at the Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan are not funded by Canadian Heritage. The 20% increase does not affect us. We are funded by Health Canada through the Société santé en français.

Regarding the new action plan, as it relates to our basic operations, the amounts for networking have seen little increase.

Our challenge is more with small networks that offer few services in French, compared to others who have synergies with systems already in place because they offer more services. I would say that our funding is insufficient, because we really are the network that urges the regional health authority to act.

Mrs. Anne Leis: I just want to go back to sustainability. What could enhance sustainability, in my view, would be to use the money as an driver to get the province to take charge, little by little, of services that fall within provincial jurisdiction. With a bit of creativity, it can be done. However, we would have to demand specific accountability. We still have problems in that regard with education transfers.

Mr. Alpha Barry: The 20% increase does not apply to us because we do not receive these funds.

In the action plan, we deliver on our community and cultural mandate through the OLEP.

This funding is essential. You know that a strategic agreement was struck between the Canadian government, the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones, or FNCSF, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA, and the Commission nationale des parents francophones, or CNPF.

I want to stress that in Saskatchewan, we still feel the effects of the shortfalls in that regard. From what I hear from the FNCSF, it seems that my colleagues still feel them too, except in Ontario.

● (1000)

Mr. Kouame N'Goandi: As is the case for the others here, the 20% increase does not affect us. When it comes to our other funding organizations, a 10% increase was announced, but to date, we do not know how the funds will be allocated.

That created a vacuum and, as you said, we do not know if we should hire people or if we can start projects. We have to wait, and this is disrupting our activities.

Mr. Francis Kasongo: We get our regular funding through the OLEP. So far, negotiations have not been successful, which has created quite a disturbance for an institution such as ours. The school year has already begun, but we still do not know what our core funding will be and when things will be resolved. That is why we had to negotiate with a financial institution to continue our activities.

Mr. Carol-Guillaume Gagné: That is right, we have not yet received the 20% increase in funding. Last week, we received a nice letter telling us that the money was coming, but it still has not come. We are in a similar situation to what my colleagues have described. Usually, the Department of Education, through a federal-provincial agreement, receives the funding and transfers a certain amount to us. That normally happens in July, but in this case, since no agreement has been signed yet, provincial officials tell us that they are sorry but they cannot provide us with those funds.

Not only did we not get that 20% increase, we did not receive the Department of Education's contribution. At this point, in terms of cash flow, we are counting pennies, let me tell you. While preparing our employees' pay this week, I had to double check the account because neither the July funding nor the Canadian Heritage contribution had been transfered. It is a difficult situation.

Mr. Ronald Labrecque: That is the reality.

In the regional community network, everyone got the letter, but not the funds. People were asked to envision a better world, but it has not materialized yet. It is somewhat discouraging. We are more than six months into the new fiscal year, yet the money is still not available.

Mr. Denis Simard: You are talking to two provincial organizations here, but for most of our regional organizations, which are smaller, it is impossible to get a line of credit, for example. So many of their activities are just suspended until the funds are delivered. This 20% increase may seem like a nice figure—and this is not a criticism—but for a community like ours, which had a $2.2 million initial agreement, it is a small amount. We are going to have to live with that for the next five years. It works very well in a large province, where 20% of a large amount means a lot of money. However, in our case, this poses a unique challenge. We should have negotiated a new agreement instead of a 20% increase. We could have actually fulfilled our community's ambitions.

The Chair: Thank you all.

Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. Rioux now has the floor.

Mr. Jean Rioux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to all of the witnesses. We are very happy to hear from you. I often say that the language issue in Quebec is deeply important and that the vitality of French in that province depends on its vitality in the rest of Canada—and vice versa, to some extent. Quebec is the cradle of the francophonie, but we are interconnected. At the end, if time permits, I will have questions about the connection with Quebec.

Mr. Gagné, you spoke a lot about services. We all agree that their quality can be improved. However, do you feel that, in terms of services, the francophone community is getting its fair share? In Quebec, we are used to asking for our fair share. You receive your fair share from the provincial government. If you get more, does that mean that people ask for more specific services?

● (1005)

Mr. Carol-Guillaume Gagné: That is a great question.

It varies depending on the people we deal with at the department. It varies widely from one department to another or one government service to another. Sometimes we deal with good people who understand our situation. We call them champions. Other times, we are talking in a vacuum, making it much harder to get our views across. Sometimes we manage, but it is always case by case. In balance, I would say that the answer to your question is no.

There is also a restorative effect that is not easy to measure. We currently make up roughly 4% of the francophone population. That percentage was once much higher. We keep losing players. If we want to reverse that trend, then we have to work with newcomers, but we also have to continue working on retaining the former members of our community.

When we look at the first, second, and third generations, the second and third generations often represent 80% of our clientele or our pool of francophones. However, consumers of new services are far more likely to be newcomers and the first generations. That means that we are in the process of losing our older members. I am deeply concerned about that.

If we want them to stay with us, then we have make an effort because our second and third generations are part of the majority and also consume the activities of the majority. If we want to bring them into the Franco-Saskatchewanian community, then they must be provided the same quality of service that is provided to the majority. That will take a lot of money and a lot of organization, something we are currently unable to offer because we just do not have the funding.

Will we end up in the same situation two years from now? Will we have lost far more members of our second and third generations? It is worrisome and if we continue down this same path, nothing will change. Next year, in two or three years, we will be no further ahead.

Mr. Jean Rioux: Okay.

As far as federal transfers are concerned, are there any clauses that clearly state that money has to be allocated to minorities?

Mr. Carol-Guillaume Gagné: Is one of my colleagues able to answer that question?

Mr. Denis Simard: I will.

Yes. Almost every agreement states that transfers must be made to the francophone community. They often clearly state what the funding is to be used for. However, nowhere does it state what that means exactly. For example, are we talking about a community in which French is the first language or the second language?

A lot of the money allocated by the departments for the French first-language component actually goes to people for whom French is a second language in Saskatchewan by virtue of the system. The French first-language community therefore receives less than its fair share. This is a prime example of the lack of clarity. What is the province being asked to do? Are we in a way allowing the province to play games? Not enough emphasis is being placed on accountability here.

Mr. Jean Rioux: Thank you.

Mr. Barry, you talked about the fact that the action plan included increased funding, but that does not fix the structural problem.

Can you provide examples of what should be changed about how the action plan is structured?

Mr. Alpha Barry: I will use an example from the action plan that concerns us, namely the Official Languages in Education Program, or OLEP.

We have noticed some flaws over time and have divided those into three categories. First, there is the lack of consultation with the French-language school boards, then the accountability — what we are really getting from Ottawa, how the equivalence of the funding in the agreement with the province is calculated, and, finally, how the funding is used.

This funding is meant for putting the cherry on top of the cake, not decorating the cake. It is about essential funding versus supplementary funding.

I want to come back to the language clauses in the bilateral agreements. Take for example the agreement on early childhood. This agreement is up for renegotiation in three years. Will these clauses still be included in these agreements?

We are heading into an election. Elections always come with risk. If there is a change in government, what will be the risk to these language clauses in the bilateral agreements? That is a problem.

Whether or not we are receiving our fair share is a matter of equity. We are a minority community where assimilation is so intense, where school and family are the only ways to ensure sustainability and to promote our language and culture. If, at the time of funding allocation we are told that given our minority status we will get only a minority of the finding, that is not equity. Equity is asking us how much of this funding we need to ensure our vitality. That would be a fair share. As far as I am concerned, equity is completely lacking from these agreements.

Statistics Canada needs to tackle this to ensure that its statistics reflect the real data on francophones. I question the statistics that I am seeing because, as you know, there is the entire issue of recognizing rights holders.

This morning I was talking to a family like ours that speaks English and French as well as two dialects. However, we identify as francophones. For example, to the question what language is spoken at home we answer "bilingual" without understanding what is at stake. We end up not being part of the statistics as francophones even though we identify as francophones and not anglophones.

I'm not sure if that answers your question.

● (1010)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, Mr. Rioux.

Mr. Gagné, could you make a clarification?

We are from Yukon and Vancouver and we are told that child care centres are operating at full capacity, that francophone child care centres at schools are full, that there is a considerable increase in demand and that we need a hand, and so forth.

Can it be said that the situation has stabilized or will it get worse? I have heard the expression "slowing down" quite a bit. I would like to know how the situation compares to the other two sites we visited. Is there enthusiasm for the francophonie or not?

Mr. Carol-Guillaume Gagné: It is a huge problem because the waiting list varies depending on the season. We often say that the famous waiting lists are not waiting lists, they are lists of francophones that we are losing. They cannot afford to stay on the waiting list. They end up finding another child care centre and if that place happens to be English, then we lose those francophones.

Our reality is that this is still the case in major urban centres. We still have waiting lists. In rural areas, things are different. Work there has to be much more focused on francophiles because francophones have often abandoned the rural areas. We have to work on that. We do not want to lose them as well. We have to continue working to keep them among us.

In the brief that we submitted, we offer solutions. We have to keep child care spots available for francophone rights holders.

For example, in Gravelbourg, there is a limited number of spots, but under departmental requirements, those child care spots must be filled. The child care centres have no choice if they want to be profitable.

A francophone could request a spot for six months down the road, but spots cannot be left open. The places have to be filled under departmental criteria.

One of these days, if we really want to have an effective child care system, we might have to find a method that would keep these spots open.

● (1015)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gagné.

Sylvie Boucher has the floor for two or three minutes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Pardon?

The Chair: I said two or three minutes because we are running out of time and will soon have to stop these proceedings.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That's too bad because I have a number of questions.

The Chair: Mrs. Boucher, I just want to note that I have already dropped someone from across the way in order to give you the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes, I agree. Let's move on.

Hello everyone. I am very pleased to be here today and to listen to you. We have been at this for three days and have heard quite the statements.

Mr. Barry, you were talking about politics earlier. Three political parties are represented here. You are right that this often depends on political will. It is sad that we have to say that. I am a politician. We have to be clear about that.

Help me understand something. In some provinces, the French fact is not really recognized or not recognized at all. Is the French fact recognized here in Saskatchewan as a Franco-Saskatchewanian identity? That is my first question.

My second question is the following. There is a lot of talk about modernizing the Official Languages Act. We have been hearing that for three years. I don't know if it's still being drafted or what, but I just want to point out that we are one year away from an election.

I would like your thoughts on this because some communities do not want to become a pawn in a political game between the parties in the context of modernizing legislation. I'll be honest, I would have liked the OLA to be modernized because I think that the French fact is very important and should not be a political issue. The French fact is a state of mind. We are the two founding peoples of Canada and I would like anglophones to understand that.

My questions were short, but I would like to have an answer, please.

Mr. Denis Simard: Thank you for your questions.

I will begin with your second question. I agree with you that the francophone community, and in particular Saskatchewan's francophone community, is not a pawn in a political game. We are a vibrant community, essential to the lives of our children and our identity, part of who we are. Therefore, I believe it would be a mistake to use us a pawn in the next election.

With regard to recognition of the Saskatchewan francophone community by our province, I will be very honest and admit that we have made a lot of progress with some ministries, but that we do not even exist in the eyes of others. We have a Francophone Affairs Branch, which is a francophone office within the machinery of government. The branch facilitates contacts, but it is a service centre and a translation centre. It is not an advocacy centre, it is not a centre that helps us advance the files of the francophone community.

I will give a few examples of our relations with the ministries. We have excellent relations with the Ministry of Advanced Education at present. I said at present because, once again, things change in politics. We developed a document called "Vision 2030: Saskatchewan's Post-Secondary Education in French". We are beginning to make progress on identifying the direction of French-language education in Saskatchewan for the next few years. Both Collège Mathieu and La Cité universitaire francophone are partners in this process, and this made it possible to work with the provincial government and create a vision for the direction to take. That is excellent.

I will give you another example. When we told Saskatchewan's Ministry of Immigration that the federal government established a 4.4% target for francophone immigration, the one and only response we received was that it is a federal target and, therefore, it is up to the federal government to pay. The ministry does not want to help or support us.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Simard.

I would like to thank everyone. To use your words, you are truly a vibrant and dynamic community, and that is super. We understand everything you represent. We will be hearing from a second group shortly. I congratulate you for your drive and for defending and promoting the French community in your region.

We are going to break for a few minutes and reconvene at around 10:35. We will then welcome the second group.

● _____ (Pause) _____

●

● (1040)

The Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 108, we will continue the study of the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-23: Investing in Our Future.

I would like to welcome all of you.

I will first ask my colleagues to introduce themselves.

Mr. Arseneault, the floor is yours.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is René Arseneault. I am the member of Parliament for Madawaska—Restigouche. Madawaska and Restigouche are names of Malisеet and Mi'kmaq origin, respectively. The Malisеet and Mi'kmaq were proud allies and saved the lives of the Acadian people when they arrived in 1604, even before Quebec was founded. I like to point that out.

I am an Acadian from the region north-west of New Brunswick. I am obviously very sympathetic to the francophone cause. I am definitely proud to be a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, which consists of members from all parties who work together in a remarkable manner. We are very pleased to be discussing the official languages and the needs and interests of our francophone and francophile communities.

I welcome all of you, and I thank you for answering the call and coming to meet with us.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. Clarke, over to you.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Good morning everyone.

My name is Alupa Clarke. I am French Canadian and I come from Quebec. I am proud to be a member of Parliament and of the Conservative Party of Canada. I am also the deputy critic for official languages for my party.

I am preparing to present to the shadow cabinet a report on modernizing this legislation and how to go about doing it. Therefore, do not hesitate to share with us your priorities for its eventual modernization.

I would also like to thank you for everything you do in your daily lives to promote the French fact in Saskatchewan. I look forward to hearing from you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clarke.

Ms. Boucher, you have the floor.

● (1045)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Hello. My name is Sylvie Boucher. I am the MP for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, and I am the only female member of the Conservative Party of Canada to represent Quebec. I am proud of that and proud that I have been fighting to protect the official languages since 2006.

When you are from Quebec, you do not realize how many francophones live outside Quebec, which is very unfortunate. As Mr. Arseneault mentioned, the committee's members are politicians of all political stripes. However, since I was elected in the House a number of years ago, this is the first time that the committee has been non-partisan and that members are moving in the same direction. I hope this will continue.

We are fighting on your behalf. You are our ears and our voice. What you tell us, we relay to the government and we work together on it.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Boucher.

Mr. Choquette, the floor is yours.

Mr. François Choquette: My name is François Choquette, and I am the member of Parliament for Drummond, which is located between Montreal and Quebec City in the Province of Quebec.

I was elected in 2011. I have worked mainly in the environmental field. I was a member of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. I was also the chair of the All-Party Caucus on Climate Change and had other roles. Naturally, I continue to work on environmental issues, but I have been the critic for official languages since 2015. I am also the deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I am a teacher by profession, and I taught French to high school students and adults, mainly newcomers.

Of course, I, too, want to thank you. You are the pillars of official language minority communities, and without these communities and without their vitality the francophone communities and the official languages would not exist anywhere in Canada. You are the reason for this vitality, and we are pleased to be here and to promote both official languages.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

My name is Denis Paradis. I am the MP for Brome—Missisquoi, which is about an hour south of Montreal, near the Vermont border. It is a magnificent wine region. I was also the Minister of La Francophonie in a previous government.

I would like to welcome all of you.

Oh, Mr. Rioux just arrived. I will give him the floor.

Mr. Jean Rioux: Hello

My name is Jean Rioux. I am a new member of the committee, and this gives me the opportunity to meet with you and understand the difficulties you face. I am the MP for Saint-Jean, which is located south-west of Montreal and next to the riding represented by the committee chair, which is near the border.

Something happened in my riding that is important for the development of the francophone community: Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean reintroduced university-level courses. It is an significant step for the francophone community. Growth of the French fact across Canada has always been important to me. Having strong francophone communities will ultimately ensure the stability of Quebec, the birthplace of the French fact.

Welcome to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Rioux.

I would like to welcome the following witnesses: Mr. Patrick Hopf, of the French-Speaking Jurists Association of Saskatchewan; Ms. Céline Moukoumi, of the Communauté des Africains francophones de la Saskatchewan; Ms. Suzanne Campagne and Mr. Gilles Groleau, of the Conseil culturel fransaskois; Ms. Marie-France Kenny, of the Coopérative des publications fransaskoises; Mr. Roger Gauthier, of the Fédération des aînés fransaskois; and Ms. Karen Pozniak, of Canadian Parents for French.

Have I forgotten anyone?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny (President, Coopérative des publications fransaskoises): I see the name Marie Galohe.

The Chair: I believe she is not here. Thank you very much, Ms. Kenny.

Here are the rules. Some of you may know them if you have been here before. You have about five minutes to make your presentation. then, we will have questions and comments from committee members.

Mr. Hopf, you may start.

● (1050)

Mr. Patrick Hopf (President, French-Speaking Jurists Association of Saskatchewan): Thank you for inviting me, as the President of the French-Speaking Jurists Association of Saskatchewan, or AJEFS, to appear before the committee.

As you know, AJEFS is an organization focused on improving access to justice in French for Saskatchewan's francophones and francophiles.

AJEFS would also like to thank you for coming to Saskatchewan to consult our community on the Action Plan.

First, AJEFS was pleased that the Action plan provides $3.75 million over five years to re-establish core funding. This support will ensure the stability of AJEFS services and provide flexibility with respect to training for its members. For example, AJEFS will increase its relations and exchanges with different levels of government, and with the different provincial, national and territorial francophone legal communities. This core funding will undoubtedly help strengthen Saskatchewan's French-language community by giving it a stronger voice. This is the basis for the core funding, as per page 16 of the Action Plan.

Second, AJEFS applauded the reinstatement and modernization of the Court Challenges Program outlined in the new Action Plan. This program is very important for our community because it provides financial support to our community members who wish to argue official language cases before the courts. Under this program, a group of parents from Regina's francophone community was able to obtain a temporary school and a promise from the provincial government that it will build a new school in Regina.

Third, we want to point out the creation of the action plan to improve the bilingual capacity of the Superior Court judiciary. This plan will address shortcomings and respond to the recommendations made by the Commissioner of Official Languages. We are of the opinion that it is fundamental that litigants have the right to be heard and understood in French, without the assistance of interpreters. With its strategies for assessment, training and enhancement with respect to language needs, this new plan will help strengthen the bilingual capacity of the judiciary of Canada's Superior Courts and guarantee that those involved in court proceedings truly have equal access to justice in both official languages.

We believe it is important to promote the official bilingualism of the judges of the Supreme Court of Canada in order to foster the development of official language minority communities. Therefore, bilingualism must be a requirement for any candidate for the bench of the Supreme Court of Canada.

Finally, we want to highlight the financial support provided by the federal government to provincial governments through federal-provincial-territorial agreements. This multi-year federal investment seeks to improve access to provincial services in French. However, we recommend that Saskatchewan should be required to fulfil its official language obligations and to put in place accountability mechanisms. The province's francophones and francophiles who receive these services should be consulted and be able to evaluate the services received. We want to ensure that the funds allocated are used solely for the priorities set out in the Action Plan.

At present, access to justice in French in Saskatchewan illustrates that the provincial government must develop the reflex for providing legal services in French in order to leverage investments and help strengthen our community.

● (1055)

The number of people who speak French has increased by 5.1% since 2006, and 2,187 more people speak French regularly at home. With the arrival of new immigrants, the francophone population continues to grow. In the entire province, there are only five bilingual judges and three bilingual employees working in Provincial and Superior Court Services. At this time, only about 50 of our laws are available in French. We have very long wait times for criminal proceedings because of a shortage of court interpreters.

As I'm sure you have gathered, the active offer of legal services in French is not automatic, and we do not have enough stakeholders working in the legal system to be able to offer services in French that would be comparable in quality to the services provided in English. This means that litigants cannot exercise their right to be heard and understood in French without the assistance of an interpreter.

On behalf of the AJEFS, I see the proposed amendments as crucial to upholding the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and I believe that they respond to the challenges facing francophone minority communities in Canada.

Thank you. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Hopf.

Ms. Pozniak, please go ahead.

[*English*]

Ms. Karen Pozniak (Executive Director, Saskatchewan, Canadian Parents for French): Good morning, everyone.

My name is Karen Pozniak, and I'm the Executive Director of the Saskatchewan branch of Canadian Parents for French.

In 2017, Canadian Parents for French celebrated 40 years as a non-profit organization. We have branches in all the provinces and territories across Canada, and we very much value the relationship we have with the francophone community. We partner a lot across the country, and certainly that is the case here in Saskatchewan, so that's a very important part.

In any programming we do, there is always the cultural component; we feel it's very important that language learning and the cultural component be experienced together.

In 2016, we received the Award of Excellence from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages for the promotion of linguistic duality. Graham Fraser was the commissioner at that time, so it was a lovely end to his 10-year tenure as the commissioner.

We are grateful to Canadian Heritage for its recognition of the need to more fully support French second language organizations for the promotion and support of activities and learning opportunities. The core funding that we've received as an organization will allow us to continue to provide quality programs to parents, students and schools and to be able to meet the increase in demand, because there is an increase in enrolment year after year in Saskatchewan. For more than 10 years now, we've had a steady increase of French immersion students, and in intensive core and enriched core students as well, and late immersion has been added. That's great. We're able to do that with the increase in funding.

Many parents are continuing to put their children in the programs, and they appreciate and value the fact that Canada is officially bilingual. They want to give their children this opportunity, not just to be bilingual but multilingual, because of course we are a home to new Canadians from all over the world, so it is very important to recognize the multilingual aspect of Canada within a bilingual Canada.

Our challenge comes from that growth. It is about having qualified French language teachers to be able to meet that demand. It's really great to see in the action plan on page 44 that more than $31 million will be provided to recruit more immersion and French second language teachers, as it is at a crisis level in many parts of Canada. Some of the programs are starting to suffer because there aren't enough teachers.

I think we're at a tipping point in Saskatchewan as well, where there aren't enough qualified teachers. For example, if someone goes on maternity leave, the school may be bringing in retired teachers to be able to cover off the absence, or replacements are not available for teachers to leave for professional development or to participate more fully in organizations such as Canadian Parents for French by going to a conference where they'll be able to gain more capacity and more knowledge and bring home those organizational skills to do more programming as a president, let's say, of the organization. It's a challenge for them to have replacements. In many areas, it is becoming challenging.

I'm willing to answer any question that you have, but I would like to know where we're at and what strategies we're putting in place so that we'll have enough teachers. School boards will have to make tough decisions, and because we're all slaves to budgets, they will perhaps decrease the amount of available programming in some of the schools.

We have this wonderful opportunity for so many young people to learn the language and to be functionally bilingual, which is what we want, but I think that if we're not careful, that's going to deteriorate.

● (1100)

There's an enthusiasm for it, and I think newcomers to Canada know we are officially bilingual. More and more of them, even though they might not know English, are putting their children in French immersion because they understand how language learning works. Before, they were often counselled out of French and told to just put their children in English, but now they're counselled into taking French and keeping their mother tongue language at home. They will also learn English in the school system, and also in society.

That's the situation we are faced with. Since it takes several years to create a qualified teacher, it's a priority.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Karen.

[*Translation*]

We will now hear from Mrs. Moukoumi.

Mrs. Céline Moukoumi (President, Communauté des Africains francophones de la Saskatchewan): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It is an honour to be here with you today, so thank you for the invitation.

Since time immemorial, the pursuit of happiness for oneself and one's family has been humankind's most important quest. Aristotle talked about this, saying that it is human nature to seek a better life.

Canada is seen by many people around the world as a land of opportunity, a country where human dignity is considered to be of utmost importance, as shown in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Canada's model for a multicultural society.

In my introductory remarks, I will tell you briefly about myself and what the Communauté des Africains francophones de la Saskatchewan, or CAFS, has been doing over the past 10 years to support the successful integration of francophone newcomers in the province. I will also talk about our expectations regarding the new Action Plan for Official Languages 2018–2023, and some issues related specifically to its implementation.

My name is Céline Moukoumi. I was born in France to a family originally from Cape Verde. I arrived in Saskatchewan in October 2007 with my husband. I have two boys, aged two and seven, who were born in Canada. My older son is in grade two at École canadienne-française, and my younger son goes to daycare at the Centre éducatif Félix le chat in Saskatoon.

I have been a Canadian citizen since 2016. I am the director of operations and finances at a trucking company that does over $100 million in business and employs over 600 people in Saskatchewan and other provinces of Canada. I am very familiar with the Fransaskois community, as I have been quite involved in it for the past 10 years.

I am a founding member and current president of the CAFS, a non-profit organization created and registered in 2008 to facilitate the integration of people of African descent in Saskatchewan. Francophone newcomers face a myriad of challenges, the negative consequences of which have been seen in families for some time now.

First of all, there are challenges related to service provision in French, including limited settlement services and access to primary care, which is sometimes complicated, because newcomers are especially at risk here. Every year, our community faces tragic suicide attempts, one of which was successful in Saskatoon in 2013. Other concerns include the reunification of refugee families, which is long and complicated, as well as English classes, and so on.

There are also challenges related to economic integration. Job opportunities in French are limited, and immigration assistance services are ill-suited to our needs and do not adequately address current problems. There is no program for upgrading professional credentials, recognizing skills or finding job placements to facilitate integration.

Another concern is social integration, which requires the creation of a diverse social network. Family break-ups and parent-child conflict related to insufficient awareness about our rights and responsibilities as members of Canadian society, for example, can hinder social integration.

There are also challenges related to education and training, including knowledge of the school system, support for immigrant students and their families, as well as undereducated teenagers, early pregnancies in our community, curricula that do not really reflect the diversity in the community, and student inclusion in school settings.

Francophone newcomers also face health-related challenges, including systematic self-medication, which has very negative consequences on our population, the absence of psychological supports upon their arrival in Canada, as well as the limited number of francophone family doctors.

Finally, there is the culture component, given that intercultural dialogue, inclusion, support, as well as the appreciation and promotion of culture are necessary.

That is why the CAFS consulted other community organizations that offer services to newcomers and together we have established an innovative policy framework that aims to create the right conditions to foster inclusion and the successful integration of newcomers in Saskatchewan. This multi-sector collaborative framework, called the "Plateforme du nouvel arrivant", or Newcomer Platform, is built on six areas for action, namely, welcoming, economic integration, social integration, education, health and culture.

● (1105)

A number of innovative activities have been developed in Saskatchewan thanks to the Newcomer Platform. Newcomer welcome day is an annual event created to offer newcomers a formal but warm welcome into the community. The African cultural gala is an opportunity for francophones of African descent, who are immersed in Canadian culture every day, to share their own culture with the people of Saskatchewan, thereby fostering intercultural dialogue, which helps to break down barriers and bring people together. The fransaskois immersion program pairs immigrant families with more firmly-established fransaskois families, giving them the opportunity to get to know one another, develop friendships and lay the foundation for our shared future. We also offer a wide range of support and capacity-building services, including support in the areas of education, rights and responsibilities, and employment.

All of our services rely primarily on volunteers despite the growing demands. It is important to remember that the CAFS is one of the only francophone organizations in the province that does not have stable funding to rely on, so we do not have any permanent employees to help us meet the growing needs.

I will now talk about our questions and comments regarding the action plan.

First of all, with respect to pillar 3, "promoting a bilingual Canada", I would like to know how the integration pathway will ensure that newcomers don't have to wait several years before finding a job in their area of expertise. In the immigrant trajectory, learning the language is not the only thing that matters. Canadian experience and prior learning assessments are also important.

Second, we have a number of young francophiles showing a keen interest in bilingualism, but what opportunities do those young people have to find a bilingual job in the province? If we don't create more bilingual jobs in Saskatchewan, the young people we are training will continue to leave for Quebec and other areas. What concrete measures have you included in your plan to increase bilingual job opportunities? My—

● (1110)

The Chair: Mrs. Moukoumi, I have to ask you to stop there. You will be taking questions from members later. I would like to reserve some time for my colleagues' questions and comments.

Can we stop there? You can finish your presentation during questions and comments.

Mrs. Céline Moukoumi: Very well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now hear from Ms. Campagne and Mr. Groleau.

Mr. Gilles Groleau (Chairman of the Board of Directors, Conseil culturel fransaskois): Good morning. Thank you for having us. This a great opportunity for us.

I must digress for a moment. Yesterday I woke up red-faced because of the statement made by Ms. Brais in Quebec, and I can't stop thinking about it. It made me realize that there is still a great deal of misunderstanding between francophones and the other provinces.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: We are not aware of what you're referring to.

Mr. Gilles Groleau: You haven't heard?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: No. What did she say?

Mr. Gilles Groleau: She made some interesting statements. She asked, for example, why anyone would want to go to Saskatchewan, since we are just like Americans. This does not concern only the people of Saskatchewan, but also francophones. For our part, we are here. Obviously, it created a bit of a stir on Radio-Canada and all over the place.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Who is Ms. Brais?

Mr. Gilles Groleau: She is the wife of Mr. Legault, the leader of the CAQ. I was reflecting on all this and I realized that I still have a lot of work to do and that we are still a long way from our goal.

In my view, bilingualism depends on culture. In fact, I think the very survival of a population depends on culture. Considering the limited resources we have here in Saskatchewan, we are performing miracles, achieving incredible things, but it's all hanging by a thread. We are keeping things afloat, but it's not always easy. The French language needs to be promoted more effectively, more prominently and more actively, and the Official Languages Act needs to be modernized, so that the fransaskois culture can flourish and be showcased more.

Additionally, the act must be more than just a declaration or words written on paper. It must also be binding. For us, enforcing the legislation is key. Having meetings like this one is all well and good. I think it's excellent, but enforcing the law, what happens on the ground, is another matter. Enforcing the Official Languages Act is crucial, especially here, where we are a very small minority. We represent only about 1.8% of the population. That's pretty small, but we are quite strong.

We are a strong and vibrant community, but there are some gaps in our ability to promote our artists. Recently, one of our artists managed to take first place at the Granby International Song Festival. It was the first time in the history of Saskatchewan that one of our francophone artists has won this Quebec competition.

It's huge, but there is still work to be done. We definitely need to promote that artist. The official languages program can help us to some degree, but it must absolutely be modernized in order to be able to meet our artists' needs, whether in music, visual arts or other areas. It's also important that French not be limited to just the federal government; it needs to be recognized all across Canada.

I will now give Ms. Campagne a chance to add her remarks.

● (1115)

Ms. Suzanne Campagne (Director, Conseil culturel fransaskois): Good morning.

My name is Suzanne Campgagne, and I'm the director of the Conseil culturel fransaskois. I was a performer in Hart Rouge for years. Since I became an administrator in the arts and culture sector, I now have a different perspective.

I can tell you that it was good news for us when we heard that the Official Languages Act was going to be modernized. The Official Languages Act was created during a time when the federal and Quebec governments were clashing, but a lot has changed since then.

In the arts and culture world—and I'll certainly focus on artists and culture in my speech—we truly believe that the act, in its current form, is more about statements than it is about enforcement, as my colleague said. This is a problem for the francophone minority in Canada, and this is why we think that part VII of the act, which deals with enhancing the vitality of francophone minority communities should be the preamble of this modernized act.

We also think that the arts and culture sector should be considered its own sector. We can talk about all of the benefits of bilingual country, but artists and cultural communities essentially embody this success. If we are modernizing the act, we have to look at modernizing the promotion and development of this act, which is currently lacking. The act does not not address promoting a bilingual country, and it is artists and their work who make this happen.

One of Canada's most prolific francophone visual artists, Joe Fafard, is from Saskatchewan, and Lord Byrun, who is also from Saskatchewan, won a 50-year-old competition. Both of of these men are powerful representatives. Of course, we are showing Quebeckers that there are francophones elsewhere, but we are also showing our financial backers that their money delivers real results. This is why I truly believe that arts and culture must play an important role in the modernization of the act.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Campagne. Thank you very much, Mr. Groleau.

We will continue with Marie-France Kenny.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Good morning, Mr. Chair and honourable members.

I sincerely thank you for inviting the Coopérative des publications fransaskoises, which has published the Eau vive newspaper in Saskatchewan since 1971. My name is Marie-France Kenny, and I have been the president of this organization since May 2017.

I also thank you for travelling here. This is the first time you've come to Saskatchewan, a province that is usually forgotten, and you can tell Ms. Brais that you met with members of a strong, vibrant and active fransaskoise community.

I had the opportunity to talk about our newspaper when I testified on March 19, as part of your study on minority community media, so I will not talk too much about the newspaper itself. I will focus on the action plan, as you asked, and on what kind of impact this plan and the investments announced in the government's budget will have. The government also announced investments in media in the budget.

When I met with you in March, the Coopérative had accumulated a deficit of just over $40,000 and had one and a half employees. Since then, the government announced in its budget that it would provide funding to help minority community media, and the action plan came out. The additional funding to help minority community media will certainly help us, as these media are in precarious situations, like we were. This was in the budget, not in the action plan. We will soon be getting $50,000 in assistance. The problem with this investment from the government is that we have been told not to hire staff with this money.

We have one and a half employees, or one full-time and one part-time employee who work between 60 and 80 hours a week. One of them is here this morning. We have been told to use the money to develop new markets, and so on. We need a staff member to do that. I recommend that the government at least set a percentage. I would not mind if the government decided that 30% of the money could be used to hire employees, but the media need to be able to use some of this funding to hire staff.

The action plan investments in the young Canada works program have allowed us to hire an intern, an entry-level journalist, for one year. This is a very important resource. We will be growing to two and a half employees, which is very much needed. Next year, we will be allowed to hire another intern. I'm sure you understand that these interns need orientation, training and supervision. In return, they learn and gain experience so that they can find a full-time job at the end of the year. This means that, at the end of the year, when they've finally found their footing and are starting to understand how things work, we'll have to let them leave and find someone new. We start over from scratch.

As an employer, I assure you that if a year of experience can help them get a job, two years of experience would make it even easier for these journalists to join the workforce. I recommend that the government look at allowing newspapers to decide whether they want to keep the same intern for two years, in order to provide more stability and to give new journalists a two-year internship, which would make it easier for them to get a job afterwards.

I want to take this opportunity to remind you that these long-awaited, much-appreciated investments are absolutely essential to the survival of our newspaper, but they are one-time investments, which do not reverse the damage caused by the cuts to federal advertising we've experienced, which are in violation of the Official Languages Act.

One-time financial assistance is certainly helpful, but the annual shortfall is no different. We are talking about $50,000 a year. An investment of $50,000 this year to help us out of a difficult situation will not be renewed next year. We are talking about $50,000 a year for us, and about $2 million a year for all of our francophone minority newspapers. I urge the new Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, the hon. Pablo Rodriguez, whose mandate is to work with newspapers and manage federal advertising, to right this wrong as soon as possible.

Now, I would like to speak, not as the president of the Coopérative des publications fransaskoises, but as someone who has rather good knowledge of our communities. I have to say that the only part of the action plan I support is the part about the Canadian francophonie. I work with all parties, as long as the work will support the Canadian francophonie.

The action plan reflects the cross-Canada consultations on official languages reasonably well. I say reasonably well, since we were heard, but the investments fall short of the demands and the needs. There were a lot of oversights in Saskatchewan. The topics of women, equality and parity are hot topics now, as are family caregivers, the majority of whom are women, and assistance for seniors, yet the Fédération provinciale des Fransaskoises has not received funding for programming in three years, and its only project was denied.

● (1120)

The Fédération des aînés fransaskois, which submits programming requests, has not received funding for five years because there supposedly is not enough money. This federation has been granted a $30,000 project, but no money for programming. This means that it will not receive the additional 20% that everyone received because it did not have any programming. This may not seem like much, but for an organization that is receiving $30,000, it's a lot.

Since there is more money this year, I recommend that the so-called project granted to the Fédération des aînés fransaskois be converted into programming and that it be granted a substantial increase so that it can develop this programming.

I also recommend that support be given to the Fédération provinciale des Fransaskoises. I'm not necessarily talking about financial support, but the federation doesn't have the material and human resources to submit a detailed programming request for next year.

It takes longer than expected to implement the action plan, and most of our organizations are worried about this. In the past, we sometimes had to wait more than a year for implementation. This meant that we sometimes didn't have access to all of the initiatives and their financing. A lot of time is spent setting the criteria. Once they're set, we're given three months to implement them, but we don't have enough human or financial resources to do so.

The government should not only consult the communities about the criteria, but it should also explain to them how the consultations are factored in. There should be a mid-term evaluation. This was done in the past as part of the roadmap. However, at the time, the evaluations were simply anecdotes. There was no information about where the money had been invested. The money from the last two roadmaps still hasn't been fully invested.

I therefore suggest that at the end, if all of the money announced hasn't been spent, that it be given to all of the organizations according to the formula currently used.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: I had the opportunity to talk about our newspaper when I testified on March 19, as part of your study on minority community media, so I will not talk too much about the newspaper itself. I will focus on the action plan, as you asked, and on what kind of impact this plan and the investments announced in the government's budget will have. The government also announced investments in media in the budget.

When I met with you in March, the Coopérative had accumulated a deficit of just over $40,000 and had one and a half employees. Since then, the government announced in its budget that it would provide funding to help minority community media, and the action plan came out. The additional funding to help minority community media will certainly help us, as these media are in precarious situations, like we were. This was in the budget, not in the action plan. We will soon be getting $50,000 in assistance. The problem with this investment from the government is that we have been told not to hire staff with this money.

We have one and a half employees, or one full-time and one part-time employee who work between 60 and 80 hours a week. One of them is here this morning. We have been told to use the money to develop new markets, and so on. We need a staff member to do that. I recommend that the government at least set a percentage. I would not mind if the government decided that 30% of the money could be used to hire employees, but the media need to be able to use some of this funding to hire staff.

The action plan investments in the young Canada works program have allowed us to hire an intern, an entry-level journalist, for one year. This is a very important resource. We will be growing to two and a half employees, which is very much needed. Next year, we will be allowed to hire another intern. I'm sure you understand that these interns need orientation, training and supervision. In return, they learn and gain experience so that they can find a full-time job at the end of the year. This means that, at the end of the year, when they've finally found their footing and are starting to understand how things work, we'll have to let them leave and find someone new. We start over from scratch.

As an employer, I assure you that if a year of experience can help them get a job, two years of experience would make it even easier for these journalists to join the workforce. I recommend that the government look at allowing newspapers to decide whether they want to keep the same intern for two years, in order to provide more stability and to give new journalists a two-year internship, which would make it easier for them to get a job afterwards.

I want to take this opportunity to remind you that these long-awaited, much-appreciated investments are absolutely essential to the survival of our newspaper, but they are one-time investments, which do not reverse the damage caused by the cuts to federal advertising we've experienced, which are in violation of the Official Languages Act.

One-time financial assistance is certainly helpful, but the annual shortfall is no different. We are talking about $50,000 a year. An investment of $50,000 this year to help us out of a difficult situation will not be renewed next year. We are talking about $50,000 a year for us, and about $2 million a year for all of our francophone minority newspapers. I urge the new Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, the hon. Pablo Rodriguez, whose mandate is to work with newspapers and manage federal advertising, to right this wrong as soon as possible.

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I therefore suggest that at the end, if all of the money announced hasn't been spent, that it be given to all of the organizations according to the formula currently used.

● (1125)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Kenny.

You can add comments during your discussions with colleagues.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Okay.

The Chair: I will now call on Roger Gauthier, the young president of the Fédération des aînés fransaskois.

Mr. Roger Gauthier (Fédération des aînés fransaskois): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am grateful to the committee members for coming to see us in Saskatchewan. Like others, I strongly encouraged the committee to travel to Saskatchewan, and I am very happy to see you here.

I am not the president of the Fédération des aînés fransaskaois; I am the delegate. Unfortunately, our president, Jacqueline Plante, is on sick leave at the moment. That happens as people age: health issues come up.

I would like to thank Ms. Kenny for taking a minute of my time to second what I am about to tell you. The Fédération considers people 50 and over to be seniors. Some people think 50 is a bit young, but when people are between 50 and 65, they start getting ready to end their careers. When they get to that point, they have to be ready for it. At 65, people set their sights on living to 100. We all expect to live to 100, we are baby boomers, we are healthy, we are on the move, and we are very engaged. I have been retired for a year, I am very engaged, and I am glad I can continue to be engaged.

Fransaskois seniors live in both rural and urban environments. There are a lot of us in rural areas, and a lot of us are farmers. I should point out that farmers never retire. The average age of farmers in Saskatchewan is 55. That means a lot of them are seniors, still working the land with their wives. There are a lot of them. Sixty per cent of the Fransaskois population are seniors.

As you know, we will be a heavy burden on the Canadian population in the coming years because of the aging population.

Fransaskois seniors have impeccable French. They are the ones who demanded the right to education, family services and children's services. They are the ones whose blood, sweat and tears kept French language and culture alive. Now their top priority is quality of life. They want to remain in their communities. They want services in French and they want to participate in cultural development. That is why it is so important for them to engage in intergenerational initiatives.

We do not want to be shipped off to homes. We want to be healthy and live in our own homes for a long time. That is why home care is one of our big issues along with health promotion and social development programs.

That brings me to the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-23. There are a lot of good things in the action plan, some good investments. Unfortunately, it does not have much to offer seniors. Its impact is more indirect, mainly in terms of investments in health and social development.

With respect to health, we would like to see those investments improve access to French-language health services for seniors, who will be one of the largest user groups in the next 20 to 30 years.

On the social development front, there have been investments in age-friendly cities and communities. We want cities and communities to be places where it is easy to live in French, places that are adapted to seniors. Age-friendly cities and communities is a World Health Organization program. The model and the approach are good ones.

Seniors care about culture too. We need to respond to that. We are grateful to organizations such as the Conseil culturel fransaskois for maintaining that vitality. We are proud of our young Byrun Boutin-Maloney, winner of the Festival international de la chanson de Granby. He was the first Fransaskois to win a prize at the festival. We have other artists like him. Seniors want to keep being active in arts and culture.

● (1130)

As Ms. Kenny said, unfortunately, the action plan left the Fédération des aînés fransaskois out in the cold. Even though we applied for programs for years, all we ever got was $30,000 per year. We get no support. We know that a lot of organizations want to work with seniors, and the Fédération des aînés fransaskois really is the organization that can help them open doors to work with that group of people, but we don't have the staff to do it. Right now, we have one person doing that half-time. That needs to change, but we didn't get the 20 per cent.

It's too bad the action plan was finalized before the federal-provincial health agreements for mental health and home care were signed. Those agreements didn't include any official language obligations. The provinces are starting to work on home care and mental health issues, both of which are really important to seniors. We know that mental health and home care are particularly important for our aging population.

In Saskatchewan, there are problems with French-language services. Services in French have gone downhill over the past 10 years. We often have to make phone calls if we want service, and even then we have to wait for hours. If we want service, we have to speak English. Actual French services are very hard to come by.

Modernization of the Official Languages Act—

The Chair: Mr. Gauthier, I have to stop you there because it is about 25 minutes to noon. You can elaborate on what you've been saying when it's time for questions and comments from committee members.

We are going to dive right into the first round. If we want to wrap things up on time, I would ask each committee member to take about five minutes.

Ms. Boucher, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good morning everyone. I'm very glad you're here. I can speak only for myself, but I always enjoy talking to francophones from outside Quebec. As Ms. Campagne said, francophones from Quebec are the majority, so our experience is not the same as yours.

Ms. Campagne, what you said about how Quebec should realize that not all artists are from Quebec really had an impact on me. When I was young, I listened to Hart Rouge, Roch Voisine and Daniel Lavoie, and everyone thought those artists were from Montreal. Nobody knew they were francophones from outside Quebec.

You are part of a group, and you are familiar with the dynamics in the music scene. Why is it that francophone Canadian artists still have to do time in Montreal to make a name for themselves in 2018? Why is that? I have been a member of this committee for almost 10 years. I have been on other committees, but I have worked on the official languages file for almost 10 years. I really don't see why francophone artists from Saskatchewan or Manitoba should have to live in exile to pursue their careers.

● (1135)

Ms. Suzanne Campagne: I moved back to Saskatchewan because I didn't like the idea that anyone who wanted to do this kind of work in French would have to relocate to Quebec. Hart Rouge did it because we had no choice, but now with the Internet and everything online, that could change.

As you know, Lord Byrun took top honours at the Festival international de la chanson de Granby, which gave him access to all kinds of showcases. However, he himself has to cover the cost of getting to Montreal to participate in provincial and international showcases. Travel is tough for our artists. They have to spend a lot more than other artists to get to francophone markets. In many cases, nobody picks up the travel tab from places like Manitoba or Saskatchewan to wherever the francophone audiences are.

New Brunswick has a program called the Stratégie de promotion des artistes acadiens sur la scène internationale, SPAASI, which supports artists who want to reach international audiences. SPAASI organized a showcase in Paris two years ago called *La fable du bison et du homard*, the legend of the bison and the lobster. It was a big success. Two of our artists, Shawn Jobin and Annette Campagne, toured in France and played major festivals as a direct result of that showcase.

The problem is that there is usually not enough money and not enough is being done to set up showcases in places other than Quebec. Those resources are practically non-existent. In recent years, the Liberal government has been paying more attention to arts and culture. Canada Council for the Arts funding went up twice, and the CBC got more money too, but unfortunately, none of that money is making its way to us. If the government doesn't fund organizations like ours, if I can use that as an example—

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes, that's okay.

Ms. Suzanne Campagne: If organizations like ours don't get funding, we can't really create the space and opportunity for that to happen.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I have one last question.

What can the federal government do to create a showcase for artists? I don't believe such a things exists for francophones outside Quebec. I won't include Quebec for now. I want to talk about the francophonie in the rest of Canada.

Are there incentives that current and future governments could set up? Can we get the government, whichever government that may be, to understand that culture is fundamental, culture is our foundation?

The Chair: You have one minute for your reply, Ms. Campagne.

Ms. Suzanne Campagne: Okay. Earlier, I talked about how we need to see arts and culture as the lifeblood. Arts and culture always seem to be an afterthought in all the actions plans and roadmaps, even in the Official Languages Act. There seems to be this idea that only once people have jobs and food on the table can we turn our attention to singing and dancing, but the opposite is true. We need to devote more attention to arts and culture so that funding can flow to where arts and culture are happening.

● (1140)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Campagne.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That is interesting. It is true that I am a troubadour, but we are talking about artists like Hart Rouge and Daniel Lavoie. Angèle Arsenault, who is from Prince Edward Island, was the first Canadian artist that I listened to growing up. That was in the 1970s. Quebeckers may not remember this, but I believe she was the first artist or at least one of the first to receive the well-known Félix award. When the Félix awards were created, hers was the best-selling album in Quebec, and that was the case for several years. In short, I could name a number of artists, including Zachary Richard and other Acadians or Cajuns.

I myself participated in showcases when I was young because my main goal was to become an artist. It was impossible. What you are saying is entirely true. It was impossible. Things did not go well for me and I became a lawyer because I was worried about being a suffering artist. What's more, I am Liberal. I have all sorts of talents. In any case, I really like that idea. It has never been done.

That being said, Ms. Campagne, what I would most like to know is what happened to your poor brother, who was surrounded by I don't know how many sisters.

Ms. Suzanne Campagne: I wouldn't really describe him as my poor brother. He always got pretty much everything he wanted out of life. There were six girls and one boy in our family—

Mr. René Arseneault: Six sisters. Poor him.

Ms. Suzanne Campagne: That being said, what you are saying is true. It is difficult to recognize that some francophone artists come from other parts of Canada, which brings me back to my idea of promotion. We need to change the way we promote bilingualism and the French fact in Canada.

My brother is doing very well, by the way.

Mr. René Arseneault: I have two more specific questions.

First, Mr. Hopf, you studied common law in French, did you not?

Mr. Patrick Hopf: No. I studied it in English.

Mr. René Arseneault: What led you to join the French-Speaking Jurists Association?

Mr. Patrick Hopf: For me, it was a family matter. My grandmother was very involved in the Francophonie and so I joined the association to, in a way, pay tribute to her great work.

Mr. René Arseneault: To your roots.

Mr. Patrick Hopf: Exactly.

Mr. René Arseneault: I took notes, but I seem to have misplaced them. You mentioned earlier how many judges of the Court of Queen's Bench for Saskatchewan, or the superior court if you will, could speak and French and hear a case in French.

Mr. Patrick Hopf: That is a difficult question to answer because there are those who say they can and those who actually can. However, there are two judges here in Saskatchewan, one in Saskatoon and one in Estevan.

Mr. René Arseneault: Are they able to do it? Can they actually hear a case in French and understand what is going on without the help of an interpreter?

Mr. Patrick Hopf: Yes. Those two judges can, and we haven't received any complaints. However, the problem is that there are only two of them. If a judge has to hear an interim application during a trial, determining who can preside over the trial itself can be a problem. It also creates significant delays because we have to find a judge who is available. You can imagine how difficult it is to find someone in urgent cases.

[*English*]

Mr. René Arseneault: Madam Pozniak, I'll try to say this in English. Not being from Quebec, I learned English quite late in my life, surprisingly.

[*Translation*]

I lived in a completely homogenous French-language region.

[*English*]

As an anglophone in this province who is sensitive to French-speaking people in Canada and finds it very important that we promote that, can you tell me if there's any kind of pressure that was put on your provincial government through the years, because you've had 40 years? As I understand it, it's your 40th year of existence.

● (1145)

Ms. Karen Pozniak: It's our 41st.

Mr. René Arseneault: Through all those years, what kind of pressure was brought by your association to your provincial government when you were asking for more help, for financing, for more schools?

Ms. Karen Pozniak: One of the pillars we have is advocacy. We meet with the provincial government, because it's so important, and Canadian Parents for French is supported by the provincial government as well. We receive money from our department of education to do our programming.

There is a great amount of support, both for our organization and for the French second language programs, and the programs continue to grow. In the core French program—French as a subject—the numbers in the province were going down from the very beginning, but that's also because there are more programs, other programs, that people are putting their children into. Our French immersion programs are growing. Intensive French, which is a strengthened core program, is growing. Enriched core French is growing. There's the addition of late immersion as well. Also, enrolments in the francophone community are growing as well. There are a lot of other options.

The government is very supportive of the programs, but I think we are in a situation that is occurring across the country. There's such growth, and there's competition between provinces for teachers. There's competition between the francophone school board—the CEF—and French immersion for teachers. There's such growth in the program that it's hard to meet that capacity.

Also, I think a part of it is about the resources that are available to teachers in French immersion. Often they have to translate. They have to find resources in English, translate them, and then present them to their students. The availability of resources in French is limited.

I guess it's also a numbers game. There's a lot in English, so the resources are cheaper. When you go to French resources, it's just more expensive because of the lack of volume. That's what they tell us, anyway.

Also, there's turnover of teachers. Teachers are not staying within the profession. Teachers in general are not staying in the profession. I believe that for the teachers, it's five years. Even English teachers are leaving. I believe that Great Britain is now heading into a shortage of teachers, period.

Here's what I think happened. My understanding of the situation is that the colleges were putting out a lot of teachers and teachers weren't finding a lot of jobs, so enrolment went down and fewer teachers were graduating, and now.... As I said earlier, it takes several years to create a qualified teacher, so now I think we're coming upon a perfect storm of a situation. There's a lack, and French teachers also are leaving the profession.

The Chair: Thank you, Karen.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Arsenault.

We will now move on to Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you everyone.

[*English*]

Thank you very much for your time and for sharing your experiences with us.

[*Translation*]

My question is for the president of the French-Speaking Jurists Association of Saskatchewan.

I have here an article that was posted on #ONf by Benjamin Vachet on September 17, 2018. He is talking about the return of federal MPs to Ottawa. It reads:

> The modernization of the Official Languages Act (OLA) will constitute a large part of the FCFA's work since it intends to present its own bill at the end of November, but the return of the court challenges program remains one of the organization's main priorities in the short term.
>
> The President of the FCFA, Jean Johnson, said: "We have been told that members of the expert panel should be appointed in October, but we want to make sure that the funding that was not used over the past two years will also be transferred to the program so that none of it is lost."

The reinstatement of the court challenges program was announced at the end of February 2017. It was also announced in 2016. Two years later, funding still cannot be requested under that program because no one has been appointed to implement the program yet.

Are you aware of that? Are you working with the FCFA on the implementation of the court challenges program? You mentioned earlier that the return of this program has been a success, but it still cannot be used. There were some very important cases in your neighbouring province of British Columbia, for example, but funding could not be requested under the court challenges program.

What is actually happening on the ground and what are your requests in that regard?

● (1150)

Mr. Patrick Hopf: First of all, we are very pleased about the reinstatement of the program. However, there are some serious flaws in its application and coordination. I strongly support the work of the federation, which has taken on a leadership role in this case. We are very pleased about that.

Even though very little time has passed between the cancellation and reinstatement of the program, the problem is that organizations and individuals do not know what services are available. At this point, it is not easy to find out about the support offered by the program. I therefore think that the most important thing is to promote and implement the program.

With regard to whether or not there is sufficient funding, that is always a political issue—

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much. I want to leave a little time for Ms. Moukoumi since she did not quite finish her presentation and perhaps she would like to talk a little bit more about her concerns or give us some more information from her presentation.

Mrs. Céline Moukoumi: Thank you for this opportunity.

There are a few points that I did not get a chance to make about access to services.

In 2013, before Gaston's suicide attempt, health authorities refused us access to him, access that would certainly have made it possible to save his life. How does the government intend to facilitate the community's access to health care and how does it plan to be more receptive to what organizations such as the Communauté des Africains francophones de la Saskatchewan, or CAFS, have to say to prevent this type of situation from happening again?

Many studies conducted in Saskatchewan and other provinces show that most of the services that are currently being offered to newcomers do not adequately meet their needs. For example, the number of non-traditional families within our community is growing because in Africa we have alternative family dispute resolution mechanisms that do not involve the justice system or the police. How does the government intend to implement its plan and ensure that it meets the actual needs of newcomers? We cannot continue to use the number of people who participated in an activity as an indicator of a program's success. Success indicators must also include data on the effective changes in the situations of program participants.

With regard to the strengthening our communities component, if we want to build the Francophonie of tomorrow, we cannot just fund cultural activities on an ad hoc basis. I am thinking in particular of Black History Month celebrations. Such activities need to be a regular part of our school programs. Today, there is a lot of talk about reconciliation with indigenous peoples. It is therefore also time to take into account the cultures of newcomers in the tools used to strengthen the community, and that starts in our schools. When will school curricula be changed to reflect diversity? For example, when will it include the reading of African stories?

The sharing and transmission of culture to young people is essential in retaining newcomers since we want to increase the number of newcomers in the province.

● (1155)

Mr. François Choquette: If I understand you correctly, Ms.—

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, I think it is time to move on to someone else.

Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

Thank you, Ms. Moukoumi.

Mr. Rioux, the floor is yours.

Mr. Jean Rioux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Campagne, over the past three days, you provided a very good summary of the situation of francophone communities outside Quebec.

You are given the means to survive but not to thrive. Enhancing the vitality of both francophone and anglophone minority communities is part of Canada's identity.

You opened a door when you talked about the modernization of the act. You said that the act was designed for Quebec. Could you be more specific? How could the legislation be changed to be more Canadian?

Ms. Suzanne Campagne: I believe that the Official Languages Act was created because there was quite a bit of tension between Quebec and the federal government at that time.

If Canada is truly inclusive, then where is the evidence that people can be served in French wherever they go and that they receive equal treatment with their anglophone counterparts?

The climate in western Canada has changed a lot. Ms. Pozniak talked about the enthusiasm for learning French. Forty years ago, people had to be careful about where they spoke French in Saskatchewan. That is no longer the case. Many people have a positive understanding of French, and we need to promote it. However, under the current system, the fewer people there are, the fewer resources are allocated.

That is problematic for a province like ours because it has an impact on the way we can welcome African newcomers who come here and want to join our community. The resources are not there to accommodate newcomers and those who have already been in the community awhile. The way of thinking is that resources should be allocated by resident, and so communities with fewer residents get less. That is not a formula that works. It has never worked for us, and that is the root of the issue.

I want to come back to the promotion of bilingualism. Our bilingual country is very poorly promoted. We do not boast about the fact that we are unique in the world. People in other countries often learn several languages, but we are unique in our world, and we do not promote that in a positive way that reflects the nation as a whole. That is a problem.

Mr. Jean Rioux: Thank you.

We do not have much time left. I have one last question.

Mr. Gauthier, earlier, you said that the federal public service is now offering fewer services in French.

Is there not a contradiction there given that the number of children going into French immersion in Canada is on the rise? Shouldn't more services be offered if people are taking French immersion programs since they will then be able to communicate in both official language?

Mr. Roger Gauthier: Yes, it is rather ironic. I am part of the Comité consultatif sur les affaires francophones, which works on improving French-language services across the province.

I think that we are making more progress at the provincial level right now than at the federal level because at least the province has a mechanism in place to monitor what is happening. The federal government does not have anything like that.

Those who work in our branches or in a department are often sent to Alberta or Manitoba. Then we have to deal with people in Manitoba or Alberta to get access to those responsible for services.

People who work for the federal government are often bilingual, and they start out working within the French-language network when they are first hired. Then, as they move their way up the ranks of the public service, they disappear. They move to Alberta or Manitoba because they have worked their way up to a management position.

Take, for example, Denis Racine, who is the director general for official languages. He started his career here. Now, he lives in Ottawa. That is good. It means we have a friend there, but services offered by the federal public service in French are deplorable. We have felt that for a long time.

● (1200)

Mr. Jean Rioux: You said that services were better before. Why is the quality of service declining?

Mr. Roger Gauthier: Part of it is political. Services were streamlined. Some offices were closed. Bilingual staff was not necessarily hired, even though Saskatchewan has a fairly large number of bilingual people, on both the francophone and anglophone side. At least 4% of Saskatchewan's population is bilingual. Of that, 1.4% are francophone and the rest participated in an immersion program. After taking an immersion program, people do not necessarily stay in Saskatchewan. Many of our francophones, who are qualified people, move away because they cannot advance in their career.

There are many factors that play a role, but the fact remains that the services are not there.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Gauthier.

Thank you very much, Mr. Rioux.

That brings today's public hearing to an end. I would like to thank all the participants.

As I said to the other group earlier, you are part of a vibrant, dynamic community. I commend you not only for living in French here but also for promoting the French fact. Congratulations. Thank you for your presentations. They will be a great help to the committee.

The meeting stands adjourned.

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